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Sen. Van Woerkom fights to save school bus safety inspections from governor's ax

LANSING – School children and Michigan's School Bus Safety Inspection program moved one step closer to being protected from the governor's budget ax, announced state Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores.

The Senate passed a revised version of the Michigan State Police budget today that rejects Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proposal to eliminate the program and to repeal the state law requiring school bus inspections.

"Parents and students have the right to expect that the buses carrying our children to school are in tip-top shape," Van Woerkom said. "Losing just one child in an accident that could have been prevented with an inspection is too high a cost to justify the savings the state will realize by cutting this program."

The governor's 2005-06 budget proposal called for the elimination of the State Police School Bus Inspection program, resulting in a projected savings of \$1.2 million. Additionally, the governor's proposal also called for repealing the state law that requires that school buses be inspected on a regular basis.

"During these tough budget times, we have an obligation to bring spending in line with revenues, but it is critical we do this in a responsible manner that protects critical services," Van Woerkom said. "As a former school principal, I was deeply concerned about the prospect of this cut and what it would do to our ability to transport students safely to and from school."

The program ensures that every Michigan school bus, more than 17,000 last year alone, is inspected annually by the State Police's expert maintenance crew.

According to a State Police report, approximately 4 percent, or more than 740 of the buses inspected last year, were "yellow tagged" – meaning they were found to have a defect that required repair within 60 days.

Last year, nearly 13 percent, or more than 2,100 buses, were "red tagged" – meaning they had defects so severe they were deemed unsafe to transport students and required immediate repair.

Without the statewide program, schools that want to have their buses inspected would have to perform the inspections on their own or find the funds to pay the state to do so. Or, if the governor's proposal to eliminate the state law mandating the inspections were approved, the schools could chose to not conduct the inspections at all.

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